



## **NEWS FROM NOAA**

**NATIONAL OCEANIC & ATMOSPHERIC ADMINISTRATION • US DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE**

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Contact: Connie Barclay/Daniel Parry  
(301) 713-2370

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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**  
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### **NOAA SEEKS COMMENT ON PROPOSED AUTHORIZATION FOR THE HARASSMENT OF MARINE MAMMALS INCIDENTAL TO AIR FORCE GUNNERY EXERCISES**

NOAA Fisheries Service is seeking comments now through Feb. 22, 2006, on a proposal from the U.S. Air Force to conduct air-to-surface gunnery exercises in the Gulf of Mexico off the coast of Florida. The exercises conducted from Eglin Air Force Base may result in the incidental harassment of marine mammals.

AC-130 aircraft gunnery missions involve water surface impacts of projectiles and small underwater detonations. Because these small detonations could potentially affect marine mammals, the Air Force must request an authorization from NOAA under the Marine Mammal Protection Act.

To help protect marine life in the vicinity of the exercises, the Air Force plans to use mitigation measures, including aerial surveys prior to firing exercises. Plans include limiting impacts to areas where marine mammals are not sighted.

If a dolphin or sea turtle is sighted within 5 nautical miles of the designated site, they will postpone the firing exercise, and select an alternative area. The AC-130 aircrew can scan a 5-nm (9.3-kilometer) radius around the potential impact area to ensure it is clear of surface craft, marine mammals and sea turtles. The crew uses radar, all-light television, infrared sensors, and visual means to scan an area for marine mammals. Once the area survey is completed, the firing sequence is initiated. Missions typically involve the use of 25-mm, 40-mm and 105-mm gunnery rounds. The actual firing activities typically do not exceed 30 minutes.

NOAA Fisheries Service has preliminarily determined that these military exercises will not result in more than a negligible impact on affected marine mammal stocks. It is anticipated that no marine mammals or sea turtles would be seriously injured or killed.

NOAA's Fisheries Service will accept comments on the application and proposed authorization through Feb. 22, 2006. Comments should be addressed to:  
Steve Leathery, Chief, Permits, Conservation and Education Division  
Office of Protected Resources, NOAA Fisheries Service, 1315 East-West Highway,  
Silver Spring, MD 20910.

A copy of the application and *Federal Register* notice may be obtained by contacting the same office, or online at:  
[http://www.nmfs.noaa.gov/prot\\_res/PR2/Small\\_Take/smalltake\\_info.htm#applications](http://www.nmfs.noaa.gov/prot_res/PR2/Small_Take/smalltake_info.htm#applications).

NOAA Fisheries Service is dedicated to protecting and preserving our nation's living marine resources and their habitats through scientific research, management and enforcement. NOAA Fisheries Service provides effective stewardship of these resources for the benefit of the nation, supporting coastal communities that depend upon them, and helping to provide safe and healthy seafood to consumers and recreational opportunities for the American public.

The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, an agency of the U.S. Commerce Department, is dedicated to enhancing economic security and national safety through the prediction and research of weather and climate-related events and providing environmental stewardship of our nation's coastal and marine resources. Through the emerging Global Earth Observation System of Systems (GEOSS), NOAA is working with its federal partners and nearly 60 countries to develop a global monitoring network that is as integrated as the planet it observes.

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On the Web:

NOAA: <http://www.noaa.gov>

NOAA Fisheries Service: <http://www.nmfs.noaa.gov>